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## Section I

1865 - - 1944

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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
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BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY  
PLANT MATERIALS SECTION

**THE KU KLUX KLAN**

**SECTION I**

**1865 - 1944**

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**July, 1957**

**Federal Bureau of Investigation  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <u>PREFACE</u> . . . . .  | i   |
| <u>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</u> . . . . .  | iii |
| A. Summary . . . . .  | iii |
| B. Conclusions . . . . .  | iv  |
| <u>I. THE KLAN OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD</u> . . . . .                             | 1   |
| A. North and South Divided over Slavery . . . . .                                     | 1   |
| B. Military Government Rules the South . . . . .                                      | 2   |
| C. Union League Organizes the Negroes . . . . .                                       | 3   |
| D. Vigilante Groups Arise . . . . .   | 4   |
| E. Ku Klux Klan Starts as a Social Club . . . . .                                     | 4   |
| F. Southern Leaders Take Over the Klan . . . . .                                      | 5   |
| G. Klan Principles Set Forth . . . . .  | 6   |
| H. Klan Expands Rapidly . . . . .   | 8   |
| I. Original Klan Disbanded . . . . .  | 8   |
| <u>II. THE KLAN DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR I</u> . . . . .                            | 11  |
| A. Klan Revival Linked to Other Intolerant Movements . . . . .                        | 11  |
| 1. The Know-Nothing Movement . . . . .  | 11  |
| 2. The American Protective Association . . . . .                                      | 12  |
| 3. The Rising Tide of Immigration . . . . .   | 14  |
| 4. Thomas E. Watson . . . . .   | 16  |
| 5. The Menace . . . . .   | 16  |
| B. William Joseph Simmons Revives the Klan in 1915 . . . . .                          | 17  |
| C. Program of "Pure Americanism" Based on Racial<br>and Religious Prejudice . . . . . | 17  |
| D. Kloran Outlines Government of Klan . . . . .                                       | 20  |
| E. Professional Promoters Take Over the Klan . . . . .                                | 21  |
| F. Acts of Terrorism Lead to Congressional<br>Investigation . . . . .                 | 23  |

|                              |   |    |
|------------------------------|---|----|
| G.                           | Dissension Arises Within the Klan . . . . .                     | 24 |
| H.                           | Hiram Wesley Evans Gains Control . . . . .                      | 25 |
| I.                           | Excesses in Indiana Contribute to Downfall of Klan .            | 27 |
| J.                           | Klan Revival Attempted in 1937 . . . . .                        | 30 |
| K.                           | James A. Colescott Becomes Imperial Wizard in<br>1939 . . . . . | 31 |
| L.                           | Klan Suspends Operations in 1944 . . . . .                      | 34 |
| <u>SOURCE PAGE</u> . . . . . |   | 36 |

## PREFACE

The Ku Klux Klan is once again receiving public attention. This time, the problem of integration has been the occasion. In order to better understand the Ku Klux Klan of today, a review of Klan activities during other periods of United States history will be helpful. Usually, it has been during periods of social unrest that the Klan and similar organizations have risen to their greatest heights.

The Klan has been chosen for attention because it has become the best known of many organizations with similar aims and purposes. The alliterative name, Ku Klux Klan, is catchy and easy to remember, with an air of mystery about it well suited to a secret order. This name has been used by various groups who sought to capitalize on the Klan's name in forming organizations whose activities could best be promoted through a haze of mystery and ritual.

Section I of this study is a brief historical summary of Klan activities in the period from 1865 to 1944. It is to be understood that this is not an exhaustive study of the history of the Ku Klux Klan. It is simply an introductory summary to the subject, organized to delineate the

basic nature of the Klan and its ideas. Section II, which is to follow, will be a more detailed analysis of the renewed activities of the Klan after 1944.

This monograph has been compiled from public-source and confidential material.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### A. Summary

The original Ku Klux Klan was formed as a social organization in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1865. Southern leaders transformed it into a vigilante group during Reconstruction years, but acts of violence committed in the name of the Klan caused them to disband the organization.

The Klan was revived in 1915 by William Joseph Simmons. After 1920, it grew rapidly under the guidance of professional promoter Edward Young Clarke. The Klan reached its zenith in about 1925 under Hiram Wesley Evans, but revelations of terroristic practices and political corruption resulted in a decline of Klan activities after 1925. A brief resurgence started in the late 1930s under James A. Colescott. In the early 1940s, adverse publicity linked the Klan with the German-American Bund, and a brutal murder brought on an investigation of the Klan by the State of Georgia. The Federal Government sought to collect back taxes for the years 1921 to 1924 and for 1926. In June, 1944, Colescott announced that the Klan was suspending operations. By 1945, however, Klan activities had resumed under different leadership.

**B. Conclusions**

- 1. Chaotic conditions in the South during Reconstruction days brought about the rise of the first Ku Klux Klan as a vigilante organization to intimidate the Negroes and restore white supremacy.**
- 2. The Klan was revived in 1915 as an organization of "pure Americanism" based on a fourfold program of antagonism to Catholics, Jews, Negroes, and persons of foreign birth.**
- 3. The revived Klan was conceived and directed by promoters who sought political power and personal wealth by capitalizing on racial and religious intolerance.**



## **I. THE KLAN OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD**

### **A. North and South Divided over Slavery**

One hundred years ago the stage was being set for the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan. On March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court decided the Dred Scott Case, holding that Congress had no power to prohibit slavery in the territories. The decision added fuel to the growing controversy between the North and the South on the subject of slavery. By 1860, it was apparent that peaceful compromise of differences could not be had, and, in 1861, the country was plunged into a four-year Civil War.

Whatever may have been the other important reasons contributing to the secession of the Southern States from the Union, it soon became apparent that abolition of slavery was the dominant public issue to be decided by the war. President Lincoln differed with Congress as to how this was to be accomplished, the Chief Executive favoring a gradual change within the framework of existing state governments, and Congress insisting that reconstruction efforts be based on the premise that the Southern States were conquered territory.

Lincoln did not live to see the end of the war. President Johnson favored a program similar to Lincoln's, and since Congress did not meet again until December, 1865, he placed his program into effect during the summer of that year. Provisional governors were appointed for the Southern States under liberal reorganization terms. It was left up to the states to decide if the franchise would be given to Negroes.

B. Military Government Rules the South

When Congress met in December, 1865, it refused to admit the representatives of the Southern States and set up a Joint Committee on Reconstruction to investigate the situation. Starting in March, 1867, Congress enacted a series of Reconstruction Acts which declared that, except in Tennessee, no legal governments existed in the former Confederacy. The Southern States were divided into five military districts under control of the Army. The commanding general of each district was ordered to compile a list of voters in each state, including Negroes.

When the registration of voters was completed, it was found that 703,000 Negroes and 625,000 whites were eligible for the franchise.

Nearly 200,000 whites had been disqualified on the ground that they had voluntarily aided the Confederacy. In five states there were Negro majorities. But even though Negro voters were in the majority, leadership was assumed by white men -- carpetbaggers (Northerners who had come to the South in the hope of gaining power and fortune) and scalawags (Southern whites who supported the Reconstruction governments).

C. Union League Organizes the Negroes

The Union League, sometimes called the Loyal League, was organized in 1862 to promote the Union cause during the Civil War. It distributed war literature, raised money for the relief of soldiers, and recruited both white and Negro volunteers for the Union Army.

After the war ended, the activities of the Union League were extended into the South. Negroes were admitted to membership, and the carpetbaggers and scalawags soon saw in the League a potent instrument for controlling the Negro vote. Various methods were used to keep the Negroes under control -- night meetings, impressive ceremonies, solemn oaths, parades and drills, and threats of being returned to slavery. Strict discipline was maintained by the white leaders. Soon, nearly the entire colored population was brought under the influence of the League.

D. Vigilante Groups Arise

Southern whites found the situation intolerable, for as long as the Negro vote was controlled by Reconstruction forces their position was hopeless. As a result, vigilante organizations came into existence throughout the South as a means of intimidating Negro voters and forcing them to renounce their new political power. One of the largest was the Knights of the White Camellia, formed in Louisiana in 1867. Others bore such descriptive names as the Pale Faces, the White Brotherhood, and the Order of the White Rose. The most famous, however, was the organization that came to be known as the Ku Klux Klan.

E. Ku Klux Klan Starts as a Social Club

According to many historians, the Ku Klux Klan started innocently enough. In December, 1865, a group of ex-Confederate soldiers in Pulaski, Tennessee, decided to form a secret social club. They took the Greek word for circle, kuklos, for a name, which soon became Ku Klux, with Klan added for alliteration. An old, abandoned house was used for the club's initiation ceremonies. The Negroes in Pulaski were frightened by the mysterious activities taking place in a house which they believed to be

haunted. This fact soon became known to the club members, who began to circulate stories that the haunted house was being visited by ghosts of dead Confederates who were concerned over the activities of their former slaves.

Before long, mounted parades were added. Horses with muffled hoofs walked noiselessly over the ground, with both horses and riders fantastically garbed. The houses of the more aggressive Negroes were visited in the nighttime by these ghostly riders, but the object, at this time, was only to frighten the Negroes. The method was so effective that it soon spread to other communities.

#### F. Southern Leaders Take Over the Klan

Shortly after the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 were passed by Congress, some Southern leaders took over the Klan at a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Most historians place General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a celebrated Confederate cavalry leader, as the leader of the Klan during the Reconstruction period. Although Forrest denied being a member of the Klan in testimony before a congressional committee investigating the Klan in 1871, it was apparent that he had the knowledge of a very high-ranking leader of the Klan.

The Nashville meeting set up an oath of secrecy to be taken by all members, and set the pattern for the mysterious names and mumbo jumbo connected with the Klan which exist to this day. The constitution, or Prescript, provided for an Empire, i. e., the Southern States. This Empire soon became known as the Invisible Empire, and was divided into Realms corresponding to individual states. Realms were divided into Dominions (groups of counties approximating congressional districts); Dominions into Provinces (counties); and Provinces into Dens (local units). Officers were designated under mysterious titles: the Grand Wizard of the Empire and his ten Genii; a Grand Dragon of the Realm and his eight Hydras; a Grand Titan of the Dominion and his six Furies; a Grand Giant of the Province and his four Goblins; a Grand Cyclops of the Den and his two Night Hawks; a Grand Magi; a Grand Monk; a Grand Scribe; a Grand Exchequer; a Grand Turk; and a Grand Sentinel. Ordinary run-of-the-mill members were known as Ghouls.

G. Klan Principles Set Forth

A revised Prescript of the Klan in 1868 stated that the Klan's principles included "all that is chivalric in conduct, noble in sentiment, generous in manhood, and patriotic in purpose." It listed three objectives:

1. To protect the weak, the innocent, and the defenseless from the indignities, wrongs, and outrages of the lawless, the violent, and the brutal; to relieve the injured and oppressed; to succor the suffering and unfortunate, and especially the widows and orphans of Confederate soldiers.

2. To protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and all laws passed in conformity thereto, and to protect the States and the people thereof from all invasion from any source whatever.

3. To aid and assist in the execution of all constitutional laws, and to protect the people from unlawful seizure, and from trial except by their peers in conformity to the laws of the land.

On paper, these were worthy aims. It was, however, in the list of questions to be asked and satisfactorily answered by prospective members that the true purpose of the Klan was revealed. Included were such questions as:

1. Are you opposed to the principles and policy of the Radical Party, and to the Loyal League, and the Grand Army of the Republic?

2. Are you opposed to Negro equality, both social and political?

3. Are you in favor of a white man's government in this country?

4. Are you in favor of the re-enfranchisement and emancipation of the white men of the South and the restitution to the Southern people of all their rights?

H. Klan Expands Rapidly

The Ku Klux Klan expanded rapidly throughout the South. The air of mystery surrounding its activities, the robes and masks, the silent parades, the midnight rides, the mysterious language and commands -- all were effective weapons with which to terrify the Negroes and to intimidate the carpetbaggers and scalawags who led them.

Although the Prescript of the Klan set up an elaborate chain of command, in actual practice control over local units was largely lacking. This led to excesses being committed by reckless and even lawless local leaders. Floggings, tar-and-feather parties, and other terroristic acts became commonplace. In addition, persons and groups who had no connection with the Klan utilized its methods and regalia to commit acts of violence for which the Klan was blamed.

I. Original Klan Disbanded

Terror and violence in the name of the Klan became so prevalent by the end of 1868 that some leaders of the Klan, realizing that they had set



in motion a piece of machinery whose power they had not foreseen and which was rapidly getting beyond their control, ordered the Klan disbanded. In spite of this action, local organizations continued, some of them for several years. As a result, one state after another enacted legislation designed to curb Klan activities. In some states, martial law was proclaimed. When these steps failed to restore order, action by Congress was inevitable.

In May, 1870, Congress passed the first three Enforcement Acts. This legislation was designed to penalize those found guilty of using force, bribery, or intimidation to prevent citizens from voting. A second and stricter Enforcement Act was passed in February, 1871. The third Enforcement Act, sometimes called the Ku Klux Act, was passed in April, 1871. It specifically covered the various activities attributed to the Klan, and authorized the President of the United States to use troops to enforce its provisions and to suspend the writ of habeas corpus when he deemed it necessary to do so.

In October, 1871, President Grant utilized these powers in nine counties in South Carolina where violence and brutality had been most rampant. The trials and convictions that followed no doubt accounted, at least in part, for the sharp decline from this time on in the number of such acts attributed to the Klan.

In May, 1872, Congress passed an amnesty act which restored political rights to all but a few hundred ex-Confederates. All Federal troops were withdrawn from the South by 1877, and home rule was restored there. The Reconstruction Period and the era of the first Ku Klux Klan were over.

## II. THE KLAN DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR I

### A. Klan Revival Linked to Other Intolerant Movements

Chaotic conditions in the South after the Civil War largely explained the rise of the original Klan. This explanation is not valid for the revival of the Klan during and after World War I. It flourished, not as a result of relative social chaos, but as a commercial, promotional scheme directed by unscrupulous promoters who capitalized on various hatreds, prejudices, intolerances, and the postwar relaxation of ethics and morals in this country to create an invisible empire based on fear, violence, and secrecy. There was money to be made in this type of social racketeering.

The spirit of nativism which spawned the Know-Nothing movement of the 1850s and the American Protective Association forty years later was part of the postwar hysteria which made the Klan revival possible and profitable. A review of these and other examples of expressions of racial and religious prejudice through the years is set forth below to show the historical background of intolerance upon which the revived Klan was based.

#### 1. The Know-Nothing Movement

The Know-Nothing movement grew out of the nativism engendered by the increasing rate of immigration to this country in the mid-1800s.

Although it was intolerant of all immigrants, it was predominantly an anti-Roman Catholic movement. Such intolerance was branded by Abraham Lincoln\* in these words:

"... How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people?... As a nation, we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it 'all men are created equal, except negroes.' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics.'..." (1)

Local societies were formed to combat "foreign" influences and to uphold the "American" view. Efforts were directed toward electing only native Americans to office and requiring a 25-year residence for citizenship. Attempts to question supposed leaders concerning the movement were met with statements to the effect that they knew nothing -- hence, the name Know-Nothing arose. Although there was never a political organization bearing this name, the movement grew so rapidly that by 1855 it openly assumed the name American Party. This party was hopelessly split over the issue of slavery, and the strength of the movement was soon broken.

## 2. The American Protective Association

The American Protective Association was an anti-Catholic organization formed in Clinton, Iowa, on March 13, 1887, by a group of

\*In a letter to Joshua F. Speed dated August 24, 1855, at Springfield, Illinois.

seven men, led by Henry F. Bowers, who sought to curb the number of Catholics in this country by restricting immigration and to preserve the public schools from what they viewed as the Catholic purpose to subvert them. As the organization developed, it seized every opportunity to create a fear of imminent Catholic control of the United States, utilizing lurid anti-Catholic propaganda without regard for truth or decency. In its campaign to restrict immigration, the American Protective Association called for prohibition of the importation of pauper labor; restriction of immigration to those proving their qualifications for citizenship; and a change in the laws so that no aliens would be naturalized or allowed to vote unless they spoke the English language and had lived for seven continuous years in this country.

By capitalizing on racial and religious intolerance, the American Protective Association grew rapidly. It reached its peak in 1895-96, when it claimed a membership of 2,500,000 persons. No accurate figures are available; however, it is doubtful if actual membership was ever much more than 1,000,000.

The American Protective Association declined steadily after 1896. The Presidential candidates in 1896 were William McKinley and

William J. Bryan, and Bryan's proposal for the free and unlimited coinage of silver became the dominant political issue of the day. The leadership of the American Protective Association had refused to support McKinley's nomination because some of his intimate friends and backers were Catholics. This caused a split in the organization, one faction endorsing McKinley's nomination while another faction condemned such action. Public attention became focused on other issues, particularly after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Little was heard of the American Protective Association after 1900, although it existed, at least in name, until about 1911.

### 3. The Rising Tide of Immigration

Intolerance of persons of foreign birth was one of the fundamental precepts of the revived Ku Klux Klan. As has been noted previously, this same intolerance played a part in the activities of the Know-Nothings and the American Protective Association.

Between 1790 and 1840, fewer than a million immigrants entered the United States. In the next ten years, however, 1,713,251 immigrants arrived, most of them from Germany and Ireland. After the Civil War, the United States entered into a period of industrial expansion. Cheap, unskilled

labor was in demand. Immigrants came to this country in great numbers to fill this demand, but after 1880 the trend of immigration changed. The bulk of "the old immigration" had come from northern and western Europe, but by 1896 more than half of all immigrants were coming from southern and eastern Europe. By 1910, "the new immigration" accounted for four fifths of the immigrants to the United States.

The new immigrants tended to settle in language groups and to retain their Old World customs. Social conflicts arose. The competition of cheap labor brought demands from labor groups that immigration be restricted. European immigration continued with few restrictions, however, during the early 1900s. After World War I, European immigrants came to the United States in great numbers, but industry could no longer absorb them and the feeling against immigration became very strong.

A law which refused admittance to immigrants who could not read or write in at least one language was passed over President Wilson's veto in 1917. The quota system of immigration was first established in 1921, and made more restrictive in 1924. The "national origins" law went into effect in 1929, limiting the number of quota immigrants to 150,000, and basing the quota for individual countries on the number of people of those origins living in the United States in 1920.

4. Thomas E. Watson

During the years before World War I, there were always those to fan the flames of intolerance, to agitate against the foreign born, the Catholics, and the Jews. One of the most notorious was Thomas E. Watson, Populist Party candidate from Georgia for Vice President in 1896 and for President in 1904. His publication, Watson's Magazine, scurrilously attacked Catholics and Jews from 1910 until it was excluded from the mails after the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917. His book, The Roman Catholic Hierarchy, published in 1910, was a virulent attack on Catholicism. He was indicted three times for the publication of this book, but was never convicted. In fact, he was elected United States Senator from Georgia in 1920 and served from 1921 until his death in 1922.

5. The Menace

The anti-Catholic publication, The Menace, was established at Aurora, Missouri, in November, 1911. By its own statement, "The Menace was launched in the belief that the Roman Catholic Political Machine, in its political intrigues and its interference with established American institutions, is the deadliest enemy to our civilization and liberties." It continued publication until 1925, and built a vast circulation on the most inflammatory agitation against the Catholic religion.



B. William Joseph Simmons Revives the Klan in 1915

In 1915, another organization appeared -- Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. It was the brain child of William Joseph Simmons, a fraternal organizer who has been described variously as a "dreamer and idealist" and as a "cunning, shrewd adventurer." Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was chartered by the State of Georgia on December 4, 1915, and by the Superior Court of Fulton County, Georgia, on July 1, 1916, as "a purely benevolent and eleemosynary society...for the purpose of conducting a patriotic, secret, social, benevolent order..." Simmons borrowed the name, the regalia, and some of the nomenclature of the original Klan, but the organization and purposes of the two Klans were entirely different.

C. Program of "Pure Americanism" Based on Racial and Religious Prejudice

Ostensibly, the Klan stood for "love of country and a pure Americanism." Actually, it capitalized on racial and religious prejudices, with a fourfold program of antagonism toward Catholics, Jews, Negroes, and the foreign born. Klan rituals and official documents were couched in high-sounding, patriotic, sentimental language which gave little indication

of the basic intolerance of the organization, and could be interpreted as the occasion required. For example, the oath taken by prospective Klansmen contained this masterpiece of literary double talk:

"I swear that I will most zealously and valiantly shield and preserve by any and all justifiable means and methods the sacred constitutional rights and privileges of free public schools, free speech, free press, separation of church and state, liberty, white supremacy, just laws, and the pursuit of happiness against any encroachment of any nature by any person or persons, political party or parties, religious sect or people, native, naturalized, or foreign of any race, color, creed, lineage, or tongue whatsoever." (2)

In the case of the Reconstruction Klan, it was in the questions to be satisfactorily answered by prospective members that the true purposes of the organization became clearer. This is also true of the "Qualifying Interrogatories" composed by Simmons for candidates for "citizenship" in the "Invisible Empire," as set forth below:

"SIRS: The Knights of the Ku-Klux Klan, as a great and essentially a patriotic, fraternal, benevolent order, does not discriminate against a man on account of his religious or political creed, when same does not conflict with or antagonize the sacred rights and privileges guaranteed by our civil government and Christian ideals and institutions.

"Therefore, to avoid any misunderstanding and as evidence that we do not seek to impose unjustly the requirements of this order upon anyone who can not, on account of his religious or political scruples, voluntarily meet our requirements and faithfully practice our principles, and as proof that

we respect all honest men in their sacred convictions, whether same are agreeable with our requirements or not, we require as an absolute necessity on the part of each of you an affirmative answer to each of the following questions:

"Each of the following questions must be answered by (each of) you with an emphatic 'Yes.'

"First. Is the motive prompting your ambition to be a klansman serious and unselfish?

"Second. Are you a native-born white, Gentile American citizen?

"Third. Are you absolutely opposed to and free of any allegiance of any nature to any cause, Government, people, sect, or ruler that is foreign to the United States of America?

"Fourth. Do you believe in the tenets of the Christian religion?

"Fifth. Do you esteem the United States of America and its institutions above any other Government, civil, political, or ecclesiastical, in the whole world?

"Sixth. Will you, without mental reservation, take a solemn oath to defend, preserve, and enforce same?

"Seventh. Do you believe in clannishness and will you faithfully practice same towards klansmen?

"Eighth. Do you believe in and will you faithfully strive for the eternal maintenance of white supremacy?

"Ninth. Will you faithfully obey our constitution and laws, and conform willingly to all our usages, requirements, and regulations?

"Tenth. Can you be always depended on?" (3)

D. Kloran Outlines Government of Klan

Simmons composed the Klan's rituals and published them in a book called the Kloran. The following statement from the Kloran outlines the administrative machinery of the Klan:

"THE GOVERNMENT of the Invisible Empire is vested with the Imperial Wizard, the Emperor, assisted by his fifteen Genii -- the Imperial Officers constituting his official family; The government of a Realm is vested with a Grand Dragon, assisted by his nine Hydras -- the Grand Officers; the government of a Province is vested with a Great Titan, assisted by his twelve Furies -- the Great Officers, and a Klan is governed by an Exalted Cyclops, assisted by his twelve Terrors -- the elective officers of a klan." (4)

Officers of individual Klans were listed as follows:

|                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Exalted Cyclops | - President      |
| Klaliff         | - Vice-President |
| Klokard         | - Lecturer       |
| Kludd           | - Chaplain       |
| Kligrapp        | - Secretary      |
| Klabee          | - Treasurer      |
| Kladd           | - Conductor      |

Klarogo  
Klexter  
Klokkan (singular)  
Klokann (plural)  
Night-Hawk

- Inner Guard  
- Outer Guard  
- Investigator  
- Board of Investigators  
- Charge of Candidates

E. Professional Promoters Take Over the Klan

Whatever else he may have been, Simmons was not a successful promoter, for the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan made little progress from 1915 to 1920. Simmons has claimed that one of his trusted employees embezzled all of the Klan's funds in 1916, but that, in spite of this, he steadfastly refused the offers of those who would commercialize the Klan, even though they would have made him rich.

Subsequent events belie Simmons' sincerity. On June 7, 1920, Simmons, as Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, entered into a contract with Edward Young Clarke whereby Clarke was appointed Imperial Kleagle of the Klan in full charge of the solicitation of new members. Clarke was a professional fund raiser. With Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, whom he brought with him into the Klan work, Clarke had operated the Southern Publicity Association in Atlanta, Georgia, specializing in fund-raising campaigns for various groups, such as the Salvation Army, the Anti-Saloon League, et cetera.

Clarke set up a Propagation Department in the Klan to organize Klan units throughout the country. A high-pressure, well-organized campaign was launched for members. The country was divided into various sales territories, or Domains, each supervised by a sales manager known as a Grand Goblin. Domains were further broken down into Realms, under the supervision of King Kleagles, who were the salesmen who actually solicited memberships. Each new member made a contribution (klectoken) of \$10.00 to the Klan. Clarke's contract with Simmons gave to Clarke \$8.00 of each \$10.00 collected. Out of this \$8.00 Clarke reimbursed his solicitors. In practice, the Kleagle who sold the membership kept \$4.00; the King Kleagle, \$1.00; the Grand Goblin, 50 cents; and the Imperial Kleagle (Clarke), \$2.50. Two dollars went to the treasury of the Imperial Palace.

Under the professional leadership of Clarke and Tyler, membership in the Klan increased rapidly. Although accurate records are not available, best estimates are that the membership approximated 2,500 when Clarke signed his contract with Simmons in June, 1920. During the next 15 months, some 90,000 "aliens" were "naturalized" into the Invisible Empire.

F. Acts of Terrorism Lead to Congressional Investigation

Simmons and his Klan have been described as "more or less historical accidents." High-pressure salesmanship applied during a period of postwar hysteria capitalized on all the old intolerances against Catholics, Jews, Negroes, and the foreign born. "Pure Americanism" was the slogan. Secret rituals and passwords combined with mysterious language and strange attire gave the whole operation an air of fraternal importance. But what the Klan lacked was a legitimate reason for existence. True, the Kloran did state:

"... The prime purpose of this great Order is to develop character, practice clanishness, to protect the home and the chastity of womanhood, and to exemplify a pure patriotism towards our glorious country." (5)

Such language was not much help to the membership in defining specific objectives, even when interpreted in the light of the portion of the Klan oath mentioned previously. One Kleagle, seeking advice as to what new Klans should do upon receiving their charters, was told by his King Kleagle, "Tell them to clean up their towns." It is not surprising that acts of terrorism began to take place. Klansmen, or those purporting to be Klansmen, took it upon themselves to punish persons

who had, in their opinion, violated some law, legal or moral. Warnings, floggings, kidnappings, and murders became so widespread by the Summer of 1921 that the House Committee on Rules, in October, 1921, held hearings on Klan activities.

Simmons proved to be an evasive witness before the Committee. He denied that the Klan was responsible for acts of violence, but in the few instances where Klan involvement could be definitely shown, he quickly noted that the charters of the Klans involved had been cancelled. His testimony consisted largely of self-serving declarations on behalf of himself and the Klan, which he maintained was an innocent, fraternal organization.

G. Dissension Arises Within the Klan

No action was taken against the Klan as a result of the Committee's hearings, and the leaders of the Klan utilized this as an implied approval of Klan activities. Membership increased rapidly under the promotional direction of Clarke, but the enormous possibilities for profit and power soon brought about a struggle for control. By June, 1922, Clarke was issuing orders as the Imperial Wizard, pro tem, and was the active head of the Klan until November, 1922. Simmons had been shunted into the



background, allegedly because of illness. In the meantime, Dr. Hiram Wesley Evans, a dentist from Dallas, Texas, who had formerly acted as Exalted Cyclops and as Great Titan of the Klan in Dallas, came to Atlanta to assume the position of Imperial Kligrapp (Secretary).

On December 28, 1921, a petition, signed by 197 insurgent Klansmen, had been filed in Superior Court, Fulton County, Georgia, against the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, asking that a receiver be appointed for the Klan and that Clarke and Mrs. Tyler be enjoined and restrained from any further connection with the organization. It developed that Clarke and Mrs. Tyler, guiding lights in this organization of supposedly high principles, had been arrested in Mrs. Tyler's house in Atlanta on October 15, 1919, and fined for disorderly conduct.

#### H. Hiram Wesley Evans Gains Control

The struggle for control of the Klan turned into a battle between Clarke, supported by Simmons, and Evans. Evans prevailed and, on November 28, 1922, he was elected Imperial Wizard to succeed Simmons, who was given the title of Emperor.

By February, 1923, Evans had forced Clarke out of the Klan. It is worthy of note that on February 28, 1923, Clarke was indicted at Houston, Texas, for a violation of the White Slave Traffic Act allegedly taking place in February, 1921. On March 10, 1924, Clarke entered a plea of guilty and paid a fine of \$5,000. Clarke apparently continued his promotional activities, for on January 26, 1933, he was indicted at Jacksonville, Florida, for using the mails to defraud in connection with the promotion of The Esskaye, Incorporated, an organization which had been advertised as a "super-klan" and as a "universal brotherhood to further prosperity and mutual love."

Evans faced a problem in disposing of Simmons, for it developed that Simmons had copyrighted in his own name the Klan ritual, constitution, et cetera, and had filed copies of these supposedly secret documents with the Library of Congress. As a result, Evans was forced to make a settlement with Simmons. Simmons later said that he accepted \$90,000 in lieu of continued payments of \$1,000 per month for life, and that he lost this \$90,000 in a futile attempt to start a new order, the Knights of the Flaming Sword.

It was under the leadership of Evans that the Klan reached its peak. By the mid-1920s, its membership was estimated at from 4,000,000 to 5,000,000, although the actual figure was probably much smaller. The Klan claimed to be nonpolitical, but it controlled politics in many communities and was an active force in the elections of 1922, 1924, and 1926. Texas, Oklahoma, Indiana, Oregon, and Maine were particularly under its influence. The Klan's influence was also felt to some extent in the Presidential campaign of 1928, when Alfred E. Smith, a Catholic, was a candidate.

I. Excesses in Indiana Contribute to Downfall of Klan

The story of the Klan in Indiana is especially sordid. Shortly after World War I, David C. Stephenson arrived in Evansville, Indiana, and set about organizing war veterans. When his first efforts to enter politics were unsuccessful, he joined the Klan, taking his war veterans with him. In 1922, Evans gave Stephenson the job of organizing the Klan in Indiana. Stephenson hired full-time organizers and found Indiana to be a fertile field for the Klan's traditional program directed against Catholics, Jews, Negroes, and foreigners, which he extended to include communists, bootleggers, pacifists, evolutionists, and all persons whom the Klan considered immoral. On July 4, 1923, Stephenson assumed the office of Grand Dragon of the Realm of Indiana.

Stephenson's political ambitions continued and he used the Klan to further them. In 1923, when the Governor of Indiana was convicted of using the mails to defraud, Stephenson seized the opportunity to point out that it was the duty of the Klan to purify and purge Indiana politics. His duplicity will soon become apparent.

Stephenson took the Klan into the Indiana political campaigns of 1924. Klan candidates were successful, including the candidate for governor, and Stephenson became a political power in Indiana.

In the meantime, Stephenson had incurred the enmity of Evans. On April 17, 1924, or, in Klan language, "on the Deadly Day of the Weeping Week of the Appalling Month of the Year of the Klan LVII," Evans signed an Imperial Edict ordering the Klan in Evansville, Indiana, to try Stephenson on charges of conduct "unbecoming a Klansman," addressing the order to "All Genii, Grand Dragons and Hydras, Great Titans and Furies, Giants, King Kleagles and Kleagles, Exalted Cyclops and Terrors, and to all Citizens of the Invisible Empire, in the name of the valiant and venerated dead."

Stephenson fought back, seeking to separate the Indiana Klan from the "domination" of Evans and attacking the "money-mad" individuals seeking to exploit Klan power selfishly!

Stephenson charged, among other things, that Klan leaders in Atlanta were trying to frame him on a morals charge. In this connection, it is interesting to note that on May 24, 1924, a special investigator for Imperial Wizard Evans appeared at the office of the United States Attorney in Nashville, Tennessee, accompanied by a woman who said that in June, 1923, she and another girl had accompanied Stephenson and one of his henchmen on a trip from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Atlanta, Georgia; Nashville, Tennessee; and Louisville, Kentucky. Her story may well have been true, but when, on the night of May 28, 1924, Evan's investigator and the alleged victim were ejected from their hotel in Nashville for immoral activities, prosecution of Stephenson under the White Slave Traffic Act was declined. It appeared that the sole motive behind the complaint was to use the Department of Justice for the purpose of enabling the Klan to get rid of Stephenson.

In the end, it was Stephenson who brought about his own downfall. On April 2, 1925, he was arrested for the murder of Madge Oberholtzer in March, 1925. Due to the prominence of Stephenson and the political implications involved, the case was a controversial one, but on November 14, 1925, Stephenson was found guilty of second degree murder. Two days later he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Stephenson later said, "I should have been put in jail for my political activities but I am not guilty of murder." He fully expected that Governor Jackson, whom he had put into office, would pardon him. When no pardon was forthcoming, Stephenson began to divulge a story of graft and corruption in Indiana politics. In Indianapolis, the mayor was indicted and convicted for corrupt practices, and six members of the city council paid fines and resigned after being indicted for receiving bribes. The Governor was indicted, but invoked the statute of limitations. Numerous lesser officials were involved.

The heyday of the Klan was past. Saner voices began to prevail. True, these same voices had always spoken out against the Klan and all it stood for, but the spirit of the times had caused their warnings to fall on deaf ears. After 1928, relatively little was heard of the Klan until the appointment to public office of a former Klansman called forth criticism.

#### J. Klan Revival Attempted in 1937

The critical publicity given to the appointment of former Klansmen to public office once again brought the Klan to the attention of the American masses. Klan leaders were quick to capitalize upon the publicity to attempt to revive the organization. On August 1, 1937, a Klan official announced

from Atlanta that plans were being made for a "national Klan mobilization to crusade against un-Americanism," and that a series of Klan meetings would be held over the Nation as a protest against "alien labor agitation." On December 19, 1938, Evans, who still controlled the Klan with the title of Imperial Wizard, announced that the Klan would hold a convention the following May to organize a fight against communism and the CIO\*. He said that the Klan would reorganize on a regional basis of group interests and aims rather than along mere geographical lines. Subsequent Klan propaganda to the effect that the Klan had dropped its "opposition" to Catholics, Jews, and Negroes and would concentrate solely on a "pro-American" program was soon found to be publicity and nothing more.

K. James A. Colescott Becomes Imperial Wizard in 1939

On June 10, 1939, James Arnold Colescott succeeded Evans as Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Colescott, a former veterinarian, had been serving as Evans' assistant for two years and claimed to have been an active Klansman since 1923. At the time of his election, Colescott stated that he planned a four-year "administration of action," and that the Klan strove to promote the interests of the "native born, white, Protestant gentile" populace of America.

\*Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Evans denied reports of dissension in the Klan over policy.

However, he had attracted comment a few months earlier by attending the dedication of a new Catholic cathedral in Atlanta. The Imperial Palace of the Klan had been sold to the Catholic church as a site for the new cathedral in 1938.

When he relinquished the office of Imperial Wizard, Evans announced that he would devote his time to his asphalt paving agency in Atlanta. He had formed this company, the Southeastern Construction Company, sometime previously, and his activities in this connection are revealing. On May 30, 1940, Evans and others, including a former state highway purchasing agent, were indicted for violation of antitrust and mail fraud statutes in connection with the sale of asphalt to the Georgia State Highway Board during the period from January, 1937, to December 31, 1939. On January 24, 1941, Evans was fined \$15,000, the maximum allowable, in the United States District Court at Atlanta on a plea of nolo contendere in the antitrust case. Subsequently, on January 3, 1942, a former governor and 19 other persons, 10 of them former state officials, were indicted in Atlanta on charges of defrauding the State of Georgia of \$201,368. Evans was among those named.



Colescott began an active campaign to revive the Klan. In July, 1939, The Fiery Cross was established as the official publication of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. But the field was crowded. The depression years had spawned many other groups eager to capitalize on intolerance, hate, and economic unrest. There were [redacted] and the German-American Bund;\* William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America;\* Edward James Smythe and the Protestant War Veterans of the United States, Inc. ;\* b7C and Mrs. Leslie Fry and the Militant Christian Patriots, to mention only a few. Father Charles E. Coughlin, [redacted] and Gerald L. K. Smith each promoted his own brand of social intolerance.

Colescott ran into other difficulties. When the New Jersey Realm of the Klan held an all-day "Americanism" rally on August 18, 1940, at Camp Nordland, the German-American Bund's recreation camp near Andover, New Jersey, newspaper reports linking the Klan with the Bund proved extremely embarrassing. A brutal murder in Georgia in March, 1940, brought on an investigation of the Klan's activities by the State of Georgia and resulted in the conviction of several Klan members. In 1941, Colescott and other Klan officials were indicted in Pennsylvania on charges

\*Designated by the Attorney General pursuant to Executive Order 10450.

of illegal solicitation of funds and conspiracy to stir up hatred and ill will between different racial and religious groups in connection with attempts to revive the Klan in Pennsylvania.

L. Klan Suspends Operations in 1944

The Klan's office building in Atlanta, the last of the order's once-extensive real-estate holdings, was sold in 1943 for conversion into a housing unit. On June 4, 1944, Colescott announced that, at a secret Klonvocation (convention) held in Atlanta on April 23, 1944, the Klan had "voted to suspend the constitutional laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc., to revoke all charter Klans and to order disbandment of all provisional Klans."

The Government was seeking to collect back taxes from the Klan. In May, 1946, the Collector of Internal Revenue at Atlanta filed a \$685,305 lien against the Klan for taxes due to the United States Government for the years 1921 through 1924 and for 1926.

When Colescott announced that the Klan had voted to disband, he made the following statement:

"This does not mean that the Klan is dead. We simply have released local chapters from all obligations, financial and otherwise, to the Imperial Headquarters.

I still am Imperial Wizard. The other officials still retain their titles, although, of course, the functions of all of us are suspended. We have authority to meet and reincarnate at any time." (6)

On this implied threat of things to come, another era of the Klan came to a close. But within a year, a new era was to begin. The story of the Klan after 1944 will be the subject of a separate monograph.

SOURCE PAGE

1. Roy P. Basler (ed.), The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. 2, p. 323.
2. The Ku-Klux Klan, Hearings Before the Committee on Rules, House of Representatives, 67th Congress, First Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 100.
3. Ibid, pp. 115-116.
4. W. J. Simmons, Kloran, 4th ed. (Atlanta: The Ku Klux Press, 1916), p. 52.
5. Ibid, p 36.
6. The New York Times, June 5, 1944, p. 21.